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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [KDRG](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: PUSHING ALGERIAN MFA ON RETURN OF GUANTANAMO
DETAINEES

REF: A. STATE 145586
[B](#). ALGIERS 870
[C](#). ALGIERS 652
[D](#). ALGIERS 232

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Ford; reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#). (S) DCM met December 5 with Seddik Saoudi, Deputy Director in the MFA Consular Affairs division, to discuss the Algerian detainees at Guantanamo. The meeting was offered after we had attempted unsuccessfully for six weeks to meet with Hassane Rabehi, MFA Director General for Consular Affairs and the designated GOA contact point on Guantanamo. DCM told Saoudi that the USG was frustrated by Rabehi's prolonged unavailability, adding that we did not understand why the designated POC was perennially too busy to discuss an issue that clearly needed resolution. DCM suggested that perhaps the USG should ask the GOA to identify a new point of contact who was empowered to discuss the substance of the Guantanamo detainee issue.

[2](#). (S) Saoudi explained energetically and in excessive detail all the professional reasons why Rabehi had been unavailable recently. In addition to having to examine the consular cases of "thousands of Algerian nationals in France" in advance of President Sarkozy's December 3-5 visit to Algeria, Rabehi had been in charge of arrangements for 36,000 Algerians going on the hajj. In spite of his absence, Saoudi insisted, Rabehi wanted to work with us to find a resolution to the problem of the Algerians at Guantanamo.

[3](#). (S) DCM delivered the points contained in ref A, underscoring in response to a question from Saoudi that transfer of the Algerian detainees to Afghanistan or Pakistan for subsequent transfer to Algeria was not a feasible option. Saoudi focused on the issue of Algerians who had expressed a desire not to be returned to Algeria, asserting that he believed their lawyers were encouraging them to take such a stand. He recalled that when he interviewed Algerian detainees at Guantanamo in 2004, relatively few had expressed reservations about going home. DCM noted in response that, should the GOA wish to send another team to Guantanamo to interview the Algerian detainees, we would be prepared to pass the request to Washington, especially if it might pave the way for a third-party transfer as outlined in ref A. Saoudi then reviewed the ref A points to ensure that he understood them correctly, and promised to relay them to Rabehi before the end of the day.

[4](#). (S) Repeating a line we have heard from Rabehi in the past, Saoudi lamented that the return of detainee Sofiane Haderbach (ref B) had not been accomplished as intended in June. If the return of Haderbach and the other detainees identified in April discussions with S/WCI Ambassador Williamson (ref C) had occurred promptly, he opined, the MFA might not have encountered the subsequent opposition of "the military." Saoudi recalled that "all the necessary

preparations" had been made for the return, even to the extent of lining up an anti-terrorism judge to review the cases of returnees. On the way out of the meeting, Saoudi referred to recent U.S.-Algerian discussions in Washington on a bilateral legal cooperation agreement (ref D). Such an agreement between the two countries, he said, could facilitate detainee transfers. After all, he concluded, "the French can return terrorists" to Algeria because they have the legal agreements in place.

15. (S) COMMENT: Ambassador saw Presidential Counter-Terrorism Counselor Rezag Bara on November 6 and, although the Counselor provided excellent mint tea, he was at great pains to avoid any discussion at all of Guantanamo, insisting we talk to the MFA's Rabehi. We have badgered Rabehi's office constantly for a meeting without success. Some of Saoudi's vigorous defense of Rabehi's absence may be justified: it has been apparent in the past that Rabehi's portfolio is seriously overloaded. We expect that Saoudi, who visited Guantanamo himself and knows the dossier reasonably well, relayed the message faithfully. We recommend that we wait some time to see if there is an Algerian response.
FORD